UNITED
NATIONS

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General Assembly Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/48/134
S/25574
12 April 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Forty-eighth session
Item 114 of the preliminary list*
REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Forty-eighth year

Letter dated 9 April 1993 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the aide mémoire of the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the refugee problem in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 114 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Dragomir DJOKIC
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

* A/48/50.

ANNEX

Aide mémoire on the refugee problem in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia takes this opportunity to advise of a very difficult situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, particularly in the social field, owing to a large number of refugees who have found shelter in Yugoslavia and whose number is increasing every day. Since the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, which culminated in armed conflicts, first in Croatia and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina, over half a million of refugees arrived in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with all the economic, social and other consequences of such a process.

Through an organized society-wide action, all necessary measures have been taken in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the past period to alleviate and resolve these problems. However, these problems are becoming ever more difficult to resolve not only because of a large and increasing number of refugees but also because of the limitations faced by Yugoslavia and its population in their capabilities to provide humanitarian aid in a very difficult economic situation as a consequence of, among other things, the unfair sanctions imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. When these sanctions were established nobody questioned the humaneness of imposing severe economic and other sanctions on a country and a people taking upon themselves the humane obligation to provide shelter to such a large number of refugees. Besides, political factors do play an enormous role also in the humanitarian field, so that international assistance extended to refugees in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, especially bilateral assistance, is incomparably smaller than the assistance arriving in other parts of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and is determined in great measure by political interests, as if the refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were not the victims of the one and the same conflict.

This unequal position of more than half a million refugees - Serbs, Croats, Muslims and members of other peoples - is certainly unfavourably affected by the media discrimination against Serbs and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia systematically pursued in many countries all over the world. During the armed conflict in Croatia, for instance, the world public was not informed at all that over 250,000 Serbs had been forced to leave their ancestral homes to seek refuge in Serbia. The exodus of the Serb people in western Slavonia was never characterized as "ethnic cleansing" and the fact that the number of Serbs in Zagreb and other Croatian towns has been reduced under pressure by more than half has never been assessed as a violation of their fundamental human rights.

Even more discriminated against are the Serbs who were forced to flee the horrors of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The world public is overwhelmed with the news of the tragic fate of Muslim and Croat refugees, while only a few world agencies have reported on hundreds of thousands of Serbs who fled the devastation and other war horrors and came to Serbia, Montenegro and parts of Krajina.

We, therefore, expect from international humanitarian organizations, consistent with the principles of neutrality, impartiality and the non-political character of their activity, to contribute to an objective presentation of the humanitarian problems with which Yugoslavia is dramatically faced.

(1) At the moment there are about 655,000 refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 585,000 in the territory of the Republic of Serbia and 70,000 in the Republic of Montenegro. This number is augmented by 150,000 to 200,000 of other refugees in Serbia and 10,000 in Montenegro who are not registered with the competent authorities. This number is not final since up to 1,000 new refugees arrive in Serbia every day.

As to nationality structure, the most numerous refugees in Serbia are Serbs (84.2 per cent), Muslims (6.2 per cent) and Croats (1.6 per cent). The remaining 8 per cent accounts for Albanian, Jewish, Bulgarian, Romany and Hungarian refugees. There is an equal number of Muslim, Serb and Montenegrin refugees in Montenegro.

All refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are provided a collective protection of personal and other rights and freedoms, as well as international legal protection, in the way provided for the citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The refugees unable to find board and accommodation with relatives, friends or with other citizens are provided board and accommodation in collective facilities. Within the limits of the capacities of the country, the refugees accommodated within families are granted monthly assistance in food, items of personal hygiene, clothes and footwear. The token financial assistance to which refugees are otherwise entitled is not paid, since it is not possible to provide financial resources for that purpose.

The financial allocations of the Yugoslav Federal and Republican organs to meet the needs of a large number of refugees, as well as the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), have proved insufficient.

The situation and status of the refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is further aggravated by the United Nations sanctions. These sanctions have been draining the Yugoslav economy for nine months now, so that a large number of economic activities are at the verge of existence. In comparison to 1991, the social product has plummeted drastically, which aggravates the social and economic position of the population, especially the most vulnerable groups. Out of 2,300,000 people employed in the economy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in normal conditions, 800,000 or one third of the overall number have been laid off, with wages and salaries reduced to 70 per cent of the normal pay.

The very precise data contained in the latest "United Nations Revised Inter-agency Appeal for the former Yugoslavia, April to December 1993", are further evidence of the difficult refugee situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

This situation stretches the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia beyond the point of endurance with regard to providing housing for the refugees and handling their problems. On the other hand, the international community has shifted the brunt of the burden of caring for refugees onto the shoulders of the citizens of Yugoslavia. Until two months ago, only 10 to 15 per cent of the overall refugee needs was provided by international humanitarian organizations. This percentage has recently increased to about 30 per cent, owing primarily to the additional efforts of UNHCR, the Humanitarian Bureau of the European Community, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Belgian branch of "Médecins sans frontières" and some others.

Bilateral assistance, which otherwise is the main source of financing refugees in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia, is almost non-existent in Yugoslavia.

(2) The Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia wishes in particular to point to the very difficult situation of refugee children and women refugees. There are about 250,000 refugee children in Yugoslavia, 1,200 of them without both parents. The situation of children, as a population category in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, particularly refugee children, has worsened as a consequence of economic sanctions. In a warring environment, the social climate in which children are being raised is such as to provide fertile ground for many diseases, including mental illnesses and traumas. The situation of children in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and, by the same token, the position of refugee children, is seriously affected also by the endangered rights to the highest level of health and medical care, to quality food, social protection, etc. There is a lack of food, medicine and spare parts for medical equipment, heating oil for schools and hospitals, so that child mortality is rising.

In addition to refugee children, women refugees, particularly women with children, are also facing a difficult situation. That the number of women refugees is large is evidenced by the fact that as much as 83 per cent of all adult refugees in Serbia are women. This population group is additionally endangered because of their ill-treatment and rape in war zones.

(3) The Yugoslav Government wishes to use this opportunity in particular to draw attention to the specific situation faced by refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. They are an example of mass exile unknown thus far either to UNHCR/and international humanitarian organizations or to Yugoslav authorities, considering the fact that 96.9 per cent of all refugees have either private or public accommodation. The exceptionally difficult livelihood of many families compels refugees, an estimated 250,000 to 300,000, to look for their housing themselves. It is quite certain that many of them will try to find a solution by emigrating to other, primarily Western, countries. One of the solutions is the provision of shelters for family accommodation of refugees. In close cooperation with UNHCR, an adaptation and construction project for refugee accommodation has been initiated. However, the overall project provides for the accommodation of only 8,000 people. Owing to the exceptionally difficult economic situation brought about by economic sanctions, Yugoslavia is unable to finance this project alone. If the international community fails to provide

assistance, a large number of refugees will be forced to look for their own solutions, most probably by emigrating to other countries.

The specific nature of the refugee population in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will require that the Yugoslav authorities, in identifying their overall needs, ask for assistance from international humanitarian organizations with a view to ensuring long-term solutions to their problems.

The Yugoslav Government wishes also to point to the existence of a large number of the citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, estimated at about 400,000, living as refugees in many countries of Europe. Their stay in these countries will necessitate the solution of a large number of humanitarian problems. In order to ensure their return to Yugoslavia, it will be necessary to seek solutions through bilateral and multilateral cooperation and through concerted action.

(4) The Yugoslav Government is aware that the refugee problems will be present in this region long after the cessation of the armed conflicts. Bearing in mind the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, the conclusions of the London stage of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia and the decisions taken in various international meetings devoted to the victims of the conflict, the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia calls upon UNHCR and other international humanitarian organizations, in addition to the emergency relief assistance already provided and drawing upon their long-standing international experience in the field, to assist the competent Yugoslav authorities in finding a lasting solution to the problems of refugees and other persons affected by war and military operations. Accordingly, the Yugoslav Government interprets the definition of the term "refugee", embodied in numerous United Nations documents, in the broadest possible sense.

For the purpose of finding a long-term solution to the problem of refugees, the Yugoslav Government calls upon UNHCR and, as appropriate, other international non-governmental organizations, drawing upon the experiences and resources of all relevant international agencies, to engage in:

(a) Providing assistance for the reintegration of refugees remaining in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which would include assistance in the realization of development projects and other long-term forms of material assistance and in devising various ways of continued activity in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This should include assistance aimed at continuing the refugee settlements adaptation and construction project, and assistance in meeting the essential needs in the education, health and social protection of refugees;

(b) Providing assistance to facilitate return to their homes for those refugees who so wish after the cessation of military operations. Here we particularly have in mind the assistance in establishing normal flows of life within the so-called "emergency development" programme. In this context, the Yugoslav Government urges UNHCR to take part in the work of the existing and future intergovernmental committees for the return of refugees which will deal with those problems between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia;

(c) We also expect UNHCR to take, within the overall treatment of refugees in Yugoslavia, appropriate action in order to ensure that the refugees who fulfil the necessary conditions be granted the refugee status under the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees.

The Yugoslav Government takes this opportunity to bring the attention of international humanitarian organizations to the fact that the Security Council Committee established pursuant to Council resolution 724 (1991) concerning Yugoslavia decided to approve import of oil and natural gas into the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for humanitarian purposes, if a recognized international humanitarian organization urdertook to sponsor it. Since no association has so far indicated its intention to do so, we appeal to numerous international humanitarian organizations present in this region to help the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia alleviate the difficult humanitarian problems also through these imports.

The Yugoslav Government is aware that a final and durable solution of the refugee problem, as well as many other related problems, can be found only in the conditions of peace, respect for human rights and the right to democratic development. Therefore, the Yugoslav Government, in addition to the appeal to the international community to render urgent and long-term assistance in solving difficult humanitarian refugee problems in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia mentioned in the present aide mémoire, calls also on this occasion upon all international factors to invest further efforts in order to assess objectively the entire problem in the territory of the former Yugoslavia and arrive at its just solution by peaceful means. Only this would bring peace and prosperity to all people in this region.

Belgrade, April 1993